

The father of the horde and the superego: about one harbinger of the instance

Alan Souza Lima^{a*}
Maurício Rodrigues Souza^b

^aFederal University of Pará, Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences. Belém, PA, Brazil

^bFederal University of Pará, School of Psychology. Belém, PA, Brazil

Abstract: This article develops reflections that aims to evidence the prominence of the Totem and Taboo work in the theoretical body of psychoanalysis. In this sense, it uses the notion of superego, which we recognize as an example of this profitable “heuristic power” of Totem and Taboo to raise developments on culture, clinic and psychoanalytic theory. The superego consists of an important notion of the psychoanalytic theory even before its formulation as psychic agency; it is a conceptual element in constant elaboration work. Therefore, this paper accentuates the misconception aspect of this concept, because it consists of a notion fraught of paradoxes. Finally, it utilizes the work The Ego and Id while the other pole of this contract, because it is in this work that the superego is finally appointed and designated as psychic instance. It is also emphasized then that the paradoxical aspect of the superego can be referred to the father’s place in the Freudian myth of the primal horde.

Keywords: father, superego, metapsychology, culture.

The purpose of this article is to make a few considerations about the “heuristic power” contained in Freud’s work Totem and Taboo (1913/2012), using the notion of the superego as a foundation. In the context of the Freudian thought, we think this work has a great potential to enable the development of issues related not only to Freud’s conception about culture and everything that animates it (moral, religion, arts, law), but also to psychoanalytic conceptuality, which is understood here as the set of conceptual elaborations made by Freud based on his experience. Indeed, when we conceive this heuristic power in Totem and Taboo, we are assuming the text is the pointer of the scale of the psychoanalytic theory.

The superego is a psychic agency described by Freud in his continuous work of theorization. Rudge (1999) points out that, throughout Freud’s work, we find many passages in which the themes of prohibition, guilt and morality are formed, long before the text in which the agency is named in a definite way. Still in the second half of the 1910s, Freud (1907/1979) describes the distress that impels the neurotic to perform his obsessive acts, in an impressive parallel with the religious practices carried out by the devotee. In the important work that introduces the notion of narcissism to the theoretical body of psychoanalysis, Freud (1914/2010) describes the fundamental action of the ego ideal and of a “special psychical agency” which performs the task of seeing that the narcissistic satisfaction from the ego ideal is ensured, being an agency of observation which

will be linked to the superego in the following decade, combining the elements that constitute the foundation of what will finally be named in The Ego and the Id.

Indeed, Gerez-Ambertín (2003) affirms that the agency of the superego reveals itself in the history of psychoanalysis as a notion with the most controversial paradoxes and mistakes. Its description is not always linear and organized, its formulation is characterized by clashes, overlapping and ruptures. Freud (1933/2010) himself, when close to the end of his work, admits that many points referring the origin and the role of the superego remain obscure and without answer.

In any case, the superego seems to us a great example of the historical, clinical and conceptual resonances that Totem and Taboo has over Freud’s theoretical work. Obviously, the agency is not revealed in the text – we cannot be simplistic and affirm that everything is already contained in everything *avant la lettre*. However, the problematics that require that concept acquire form and coherence throughout the four essays that compose the text. In the face of that, it is possible for us to prepare a genealogy of the superego taking Totem and Taboo as a starting point, even if we are aware of the developments that preceded this work, which can also be considered components of the constellation of that instance.

Hence, we define as a foundation for the present work the fourth essay of the aforementioned text, which discusses the plot of the myth of the killing of the father as a condition of possibility for culture. We will use this fundamental reference for psychoanalysis since we understand that this myth, widely used by the analytical community and by researchers of the relationships between

* Corresponding address: psi_alan@yahoo.com.br

psychoanalysis and the right to express metaphorically the origin of symbolic life, goes beyond that. Tacitly, from this myth, an indelible power is drawn and it is not similar to the group architected by the law, but it keeps stubbornly influencing those who believed that they had gotten rid of its tragic influence with the death of the father of the horde. If the father dies, he becomes a myth, he becomes history, he becomes law. Precisely because of that, he haunts in a terrible way the link between brothers erected in his name.

In another extremity, we will use the work *The Ego and the Id* to contrapose the myth of the murder of the father. The choice is justified by the fact that it is in this work that the second topography is at last elaborated, after a thorough work of theorization about a theme which, as can be interpreted from previous works, escapes the tutorship of the first topographical model and the first drive dualism. However, we know that in *The Ego and the Id* there is no final word about the superego, but instead an important step of its formulation. Indeed, the fact that the text names it and defines it as *psychic agency* – which gives it a structural condition, and not contingent – will provide us with the necessary prerogatives to consider this work a strong foundation for our present purpose.

Totem and Taboo and the “Scientific Myth”

Our proposal begins with the approach of the agency of the superego based on *Totem and Taboo*, for we understand that the myth formulated by Freud (1913/2012) in the fourth essay, to discuss the origin of the social bond, of morality and of religion, has two advantages: in addition to expressing the origin of the law metaphorically, it anticipates the terrifying character of the superego.

Freud took almost two years to write *Totem and Taboo*, requiring his total attention. He only distanced himself from this goal momentarily, to write a few short articles. Mezan (2006) considers it the key work of a period in which the foundation of the psychoanalytic movement and the quarrels between Jung and Adler stimulated Freud’s theoretical production, leading him to formulations that altered the path of psychoanalysis, while making it stay on the furrows opened by it in the field of sexuality.

This paradoxical movement of alteration/permanence may be considered an *expansion* of the limits of psychoanalysis towards other paths, different from the predominantly clinical referential. After all, with *Totem and Taboo* – and also with “Introduction to Narcissism” – strong answers are given to both Jung and Adler with respect to the origins of the psyche, especially its socialization. The terms of this expansion are the answers synchronized with Jung and his “spiritual trend”, and with Adler and his criticism that psychoanalysis does not consider or hardly considers the influences of cultural factors on the formation of the subject and his neurosis.

As pointed out by Mezan (2006), the text represents a “point of convergence” for an entire period of investigation: for obsessive neurosis, we find the issue of

ambivalence and the taboos; for psychosis, the mechanism of projection and the dialectics of narcissism; and for phobia, the paternal sense of the totem. All these issues, as mentioned above, converge to the horizon of the role of the father, which is explicitly predominant in this field. This Herculean task opened a new field of work for Freud’s thought, while at the same time providing continuity to his previous theories, but having the courage to radically question them.

Since it distances the look of the analyst from the neurotic individual and his symptom, the work shows – long before the formulation of the death drive – a step taken by Freud in the direction of the formulation of the *definitive gap* between the individual and his drives regarding culture: with the origin of humanity being based on a crime committed as a group in favor of the sexual desire of their accomplices, there would be no hope of a harmonious development of sexuality for the human community from Freud’s point of view.

Indeed, the psychoanalytical approach of culture – which is also the psychoanalytical approach of the individual, for one does not exist without the other – should take into account this gap and all the tragic consequences it entails. According to Koltai (2010), with *Totem and Taboo*, Freud buries for good the idea of a possible liberation of the subject through the act of assuming their genital sexuality, as well as the theory of maturation of the subject until a definitive unification of his sexual constitution. The “full” realization of sexuality would then be linked to the pact established between brothers, thus this gap needs to interpose itself between what the drives impel and what culture allows. Here resides one of our main interests in the Freudian approach of culture, which will find in the superego one of its most reluctant antitheses, although this agency is one of the most important results of the civilization process and an important cultural achievement. It is a paradoxical relationship between two antithetical impulses that are not compatible, composing an important aspect of civilization’s discontents. It is precisely this indissoluble trait that allows us to problematize this *unassimilable rest* which cannot be analyzed in a satisfactory and resolute way by any moral, religious or legal system. Civilization would be destitute of the possibility of “being harmonized”.

On one hand, the symbolic law comes to be, and since it institutes the impossibility of the consummation of the object desired by all, it conditions the existence of culture to the renunciation of drives: it is the law that safeguards the members of the totem community from the risk of a fratricidal war. On the other hand, we can foresee an outline of the superego not only in the despotism incarnated in the figure of the primal father, but also in the law instituted after his death, which asks the sons that killed him to honor him as a form of restitution.

The origin of the law depends directly upon the prohibition of incest and parricide, the prohibitions that would found the human and social bond. Based on the Darwinian myth of the primal horde, Freud (1913/2012)

reports that there was a violent and jealous father who reserved for himself the right to the enjoyment of all females of the horde, thus expelling the sons after they grew up, for he did not admit the presence of possible rivals. The killing of the father and its consequences are reported as follows:

One day, the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly. (Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority.) Of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired part of his strength. The totem feast, which is perhaps mankind's first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began: social organization, moral restrictions and religion (p. 216-217).

The report of the killing of the primal father constitutes an essential point of convergence, based on the references used by Freud (1913/2012). It provides intelligibility to the Freudian argument, without which his theorization about the origins of religion, morality and law would remain fragile and poor. These references are mentioned by Mezan (2006), who explains that its use aims at interweaving the constructions made in the first three essays. With that purpose, Freud turns to the theory of the primal horde, formulated by Darwin and modified by Atkinson, to correspond to the primordial form of the hominid groups, since the Darwinian conjecture was made in the conditional and for the gorillas. Mezan (2006) will then say that: "By gathering these heterogeneous elements through the common reference to the Father, Freud will unify them through his 'scientific myth'" (p. 377). At this point Freud had reached, and in the face of the task imposed to him, he had no other resource except the formulation of a "scientific myth" that searched for origins, of great proportions and with surprising consequences. It is a very daring formulation within a knowledge that aims to be scientific, for it is precisely its "mythical" line that will provide this knowledge with its logical and well-finished form.

One of the first corollaries of this construction is that which discusses the group of brothers who, in a macro perspective, can also refer to humanity as a whole. Koltai (2010) comments that civilization results from this *founding act* which congregates all in the conjuration for the death of the father. There is also the imperative need of defining a starting point that is transient, i.e., that demands a sequence of other events from that moment on, and which will have the definition of that point as previous condition.

By introducing the account through the "One day" formula, Freud (1913/2012) highlights the hypothetical aspect of his construction, situated at the supposed origin of everything.

The act that occurs in this "day" constitutes the starting point of civilization – the murder of the primal father – in which a founding event is inserted and from which history can be narrated and followed. An *absolute zero of history* which does not allow relativization nor connections with any previous scenario that comes before it – this is the situation of the horde of this strict and violent father who "becomes history" with his death. And there is nothing more irreversible than death, an irreversibility which would stimulate the historical movement. For this movement to be irreversible, an act must be concluded (a murder) that does not allow one to go back. Quoting Goethe, Freud (1913/2012) says: "(...) in the beginning was the Deed" (p. 244).

The intent of the collective feast made by the sons is to consummate the identification with the power of the dead father in the hopes of taking to themselves the virtues and strengths that they used to recognize in him. At last, it is the moment in which they all experience a genuine collective feeling, one of excitement over the grandiloquence of the act they had just perpetrated and also of ecstasy, since they feel the blood of the omnipotent running through their veins. This feast reveals itself to be an act full of important consequences: (1) it institutes in a definitive way the preeminence of the father, recognized as the only one to have had that much power, which is why he was the object of ostensive idealization; (2) it establishes the cohesion of the group through a bond instituted by the flesh and blood of the father; (3) it creates based on the father which has an offspring, i.e., the existence of sons that are direct descendants of this powerful father; and (4) it institutes equality between the members of the group, since each of them incorporated part of the virtues of the father, making it possible to recognize in the different a common feature.

But then a terrifying question is imposed: with the omnipotent finally out of the way, will there be someone to take his place? Wouldn't this possible usurper start another belligerent order between the brothers, bringing back to them the need to kill? Hence, wouldn't this possibly endless cycle of "coups d'état" bring the recently recognized brothers into an infinite fratricide war? It is precisely to staunch this flow of blood that they establish the following rule: the coveted females do not belong exclusively to anyone. Exogamy is instituted, as well as the taboo of incest. The pleasure that the omnipotent allowed himself was dangerous: it provokes hatred, envy and the death drive of those who do not enjoy it. This enjoyment needs to be prohibited, and the place that conditioned it needs to remain empty. Thus, breaking this prohibition would imply a return to barbarity, since it means a return to the conjuncture of the horde, for when the pact is broken and the taboo of incest is broken, the "usurper" invalidates the contract established between the brothers, giving occasion to the possibility of "killing and being killed" in favor of

the questioned power – i.e., a return to the barbarity of the law of the strongest.

It is in this point that, according to the psychoanalytical tradition, it is possible to identify the mythical emergence of the law. The dead father will constitute the place of the law, for it will be in his name that the mentioned prohibitions will be instituted. The place of the totem in the face of the new social arrangement will be that of a fundamental mark of the system that is established since then. Thus, we have the origin of the social bond concomitantly to the origin of the subject of desire, as proposed by psychoanalysis. Both origins are directly related based on the Freudian myth, for they cannot be dissociated from one another.

Right after the account of the father's murder, Freud (1913/2012) supposes that the mutinied brothers would be governed by the same contradictory and ambivalent feelings that is found, based on analytical research, in children and in neurotics – the ambivalent impulses with respect to the father complex: “They hated the father who stood so powerfully in the way of their sexual demands and their desire for power, but they also loved and admired him” (p. 218). It is not enough to leave the place of the father empty; above all, it is necessary to exalt and praise him.

After eliminating the father and satisfying their hatred, in addition to imposing their impetuous desire to achieve the identification with him, they are imperatively taken by the tender impulses that were hidden into the hatred. Regret occurs, and the *feeling of guilt* common to all is born, a result from the satisfaction of the parricide. The feared father was also the beloved father, and it is this universal feeling of irreversible guilt that will originate and guide the entire movement that follows, with respect to the direction given by the brothers to the consequences of their original act.

Gerez-Ambertín (2011), when asking about the way subjectivity and the discourse of the law are entwined, answers that “the subject is captured by the law under the nets of culpability” (p. 39). And later on: “since psychoanalysis, it is not possible to think about the structure of subjectivity without this omnipresent category which is culpability, to the point that pretending to extirpate the guilt of the subject would imply dissolving the subject” (p. 40). If it is through the hands of crime that the man is initiated into his social organization, guilt is an indelible trait, for the consequences of this criminal act are irreversible.

Freud (1913/2012) will then say that the father that used to be a despot had become, when dead, more powerful than he had ever been in his life, thus it is no longer necessary for him to intervene with brutality to prevent the enjoyment of the forbidden women. That which was prevented by his tragic existence is now imposed by the sons who mutually prohibit one another, characterizing then a *deferred obedience* (*Nachträglich*). Mezan (2006) summarizes this passage in the following terms:

On the other hand, once the hatred for the father is satiated with the crime, the loving feelings toward him come to the surface to compensate the aggressiveness, as a necessary complement of ambivalence. Thus, the feeling of culpability is engendered from the remorse of the committed action, and the father, once dead, acquires a power much greater than that which he had in life: he is transformed into totem, and then into god. (p. 378-379)

Together with the prohibition of incest, the prohibition to kill the totem animal, the substitute of the father, is established, with the exception of the celebration of the totem feast. Hence the prohibition to kill the father and to possess the women of the group indiscriminately. The prohibitions of parricide and incest are precisely the interdictions that characterize the Oedipus complex, according to the astute comprehension of Freud (1913/2012). Indeed, he observes that these two taboos are psychologically distinct in terms of value. The first, the prohibition of incest, is imposed by matters of convenience – as is sensed, the liberation of indiscriminate sexual commerce with the females of the group would bring the sons into an intermittent war over the supremacy of the desire of only one over the others. Therefore, the interdiction of incest contains a practical fundament which is inevitable: “sexual need does not unite men, it separates them” (Freud, 1913/2012, p. 219-220). Precisely because of that, the prohibition of incest will safeguard the integrity of the contract established between brothers from that moment on, for if each of them desired deep down inside to have what used to belong to his father, there would be no one among them with the necessary strength to do so, and this is where the reason behind an indissoluble fear resides: the fear of being suddenly annihilated by the others. On the other hand, the prohibition of parricide is entirely based on emotional reasons, for the father had been eliminated, an irreversible situation which brings in its core the *nostalgia over the father*.

The place then reserved for the totem in the economy of desires of the pact makers is that of an object of veneration, identification, hatred and guilt. If the totem occupies the place of the father, it is for the pact makers to be able to personify the object of their regret, together with the totem animal. In addition, it helps to pacify the feeling of guilt, for death is not something that can be *unguilty* since one of the parts of the quarrel can no longer manifest forgiveness over his own death. This needs to be symbolically forged through an arrangement between his murderers. Mograbi and Herzog (2006) highlight this point in which the law, the guilt and the social bond are intertwined around the father with his limitless strength, who is therefore feared and admired.

Indeed, the totem constitutes the glimmer of reconciliation with the father, thus we see in its more well-finished format the exercise of ambivalence: the hated father, feared and worthy of being killed, is the identifying figure who everyone desires to be, and he is also the beloved

figure precisely because of that. Moreover, with his exorbitant power, the members of the horde find shelter from their own disputes, as long as they respect that which unquestionably belongs to the father: the absolute enjoyment.

Paradoxical Element: The Ego and the Id

Now, we move on to the analysis of the element of the superego, according to the text in which it acquires its definitive name: The Ego and the Id, from 1923. As observed by Cardoso (2002), the fact that it is finally named and elevated to the category of psychic agency does not solve the problem of the superego in a satisfactory way. Many formulations will still be listed, interconnecting many origins and functions for the agency. The considerable paradoxes result mainly from the indissoluble issue of the *endogenous* and the *exogenous* present in all of Freud's work.

In the beginning of her thorough analysis of the superego, Gerez-Ambertin (2003) states that many "normalizing" formulations about this psychic agency were being proposed as an answer to the paradoxical character of Freud's formulations. The common places get to the point of: making the superego a "benevolent figure" for subjectivity, capable of handling the relationship of the subject with reality; ensuring the good functioning of moral conscience; assuring the mental health of the subject, saving him from transgressions; and, lastly, satisfactorily regulating the relationship of the subject with the law. These formulations are mistaken precisely for not considering the "mistaken" aspect of the concept, for it strongly expresses the separation of the subject against himself. The author points out that, with respect to this psychic agency and the clinical and theoretical developments it imposes, it is possible to say that it: "is neither individual nor social; neither interior nor exterior; neither one's own nor someone else's, and additionally, it is not a mere identification of the father, neither a simple heir to the Oedipus complex" (p. 21), which enables us to think about the "mistaken aspect" mentioned above. Moreover, the superego is not a conceptual formulation that is satisfactorily compatible with the entire theoretical body of psychoanalysis.

The superego finally acquires its definitive name in the context of the second topography, articulated with the second drive dualism. It is precisely with a consideration about this theme that Freud (1923/2011) begins The Ego and the Id. He says that the discussions exposed from then on are a further development of the trains of thought which he opened up three years before, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. However, although the considerations are a continuation of that work, Freud does not turn to biology, being therefore closer to psychoanalysis. The considerations are more a summary than a speculation. In short, resuming the discussion about the status of the death drive in this context of the Freudian work, the Ego and the Id takes care of determining more precisely the place of the death drive from the topographical aspect.

By making the superego figure emerge from his text, Freud (1923/2011) aims to give form to the paradoxes that characterize the agency. These paradoxes may be a result of the long trail of elements in which the superego could be foreseen, since his first clinical works. Thus, Freud's work at that moment would not be easy, especially because it possessed the obscure death drive. According to Cardoso (2002), solving these paradoxes may be extremely difficult for psychoanalysis, since they are directly linked to the evolution of the Freudian theory. For the author, the exogenous/endogenous issue constitutes the greatest dilemma. The conceptualization of the superego provides proofs of this dilemma.

The work of the theorization of the superego results from a complex dynamic that at first implies a contest between two extremities: the prohibition (through moral conscience and self-censorship) and the ideal (through narcissism and identifications). Cardoso (2002) then proposes the introduction of a third extremity in the genealogy of the superego. It is the most obscure aspect of the element and less directly discussed, but it encompasses the most fundamental elements of the issue. She refers to the drive dimension of the superego, located in a radically different plane from that of the prohibitions. Well, if the Freudian theory of the superego has this paradoxical character, this would be mostly due to a transposition of registers: from the drive register, we move on directly to the moral prohibitions. This trend holds a significant theoretical mistake.

As a result, once it is named in a definitive way, it is necessary to question the status of the "new" psychic agency in the face of that division, which implies not attributing a harmonious understanding to the superego, as has been proposed many times. And even if we find predicaments and paradoxes related to the concept, they do not prevent our progress, for the psychoanalytical theory keeps progressing even with predicaments and paradoxes.

In the beginning, the first predicament is the use of the term *ego ideal* as a synonym for superego:

The considerations that led us to assume the existence of a grade in the ego, a differentiation within the ego, which may be called the "*Ego ideal*" or *Superego* have been stated elsewhere. They still hold good. The fact that this part of the ego is less firmly connected with consciousness is the novelty which calls for explanation. (Freud, 1923/2011, pp. 33-34, highlights by us).

Much had been said about this use of different terms to designate a same object. The notion of the *Ego ideal* had formally appeared in Freud's writing (1914/2010) in the text that introduced narcissism. It was the substitute for the narcissism lost during childhood, which decayed due to criticism and parental demands. In the face of that, the *Ego ideal* constituted a model to be followed by the Ego to reacquire the lost perfection. Rudge (1999) highlights that, with the introduction of the notion of the superego, the Ego

ideal is maintained in the Freudian terminology, whether as a synonym for superego – as in the excerpt quoted above – or as an agency based on which the superego will compare the Ego, punishing it if it is significantly beneath the ideals.

Cardoso (2002) affirms that it is possible to see a certain counterpoint between the superego and the ego ideal. Both notions put at stake a dimension of the attack of the drive and a dimension of symbolization, respectively. This counterpoint is also present in the analysis carried out by Gerez-Ambertín. In general, she says that the superego is divided into two heritages: the Oedipus and the id.

Freud's (1923/2011) affirmation that the superego "is the heir to the Oedipus Complex" (p.45) had already become proverbial, to the point that the fact that the superego is also the heir to the id is lost from sight, as Gerez-Ambertín (2002) reminds us. Precisely because of that, the author provides us a chart of the paradoxical categories of Freud's superego, in which the concept is subdivided into its "annihilating and cruel version" and its "measured version" (Gerez-Ambertín, 2003, p. 106-107).

The Oedipal heritage of the superego, which will lead to its "measured version", is justified since its formation is based on the identification of the father at the moment of the decline of the Oedipus complex. Given its prohibitive character, there would be a transformation in the libidinal cathexes on the parental objects which are being identified. Freud (1923/2011) will then say that, by renouncing the satisfaction of their Oedipal desires, the child internalizes the external prohibition. Thus, the superego is an heir to the Oedipus complex.

Well, the simplicity and the coherence of this formulation hide a few problems, such as the unconscious dimension of this part that had been differentiated from the ego. To solve this difficulty, Freud (1923/2011) will base himself once again on the model originated from melancholia (Freud, 1915/2010) to show the primordial function the lost object has in the genesis of the superego. According to him, if the Oedipal object should or must be abandoned, it is natural that an alteration occurs in the ego, and this alteration needs to be described precisely as the establishment of the object in the ego: "The similarity with the process of melancholia is unmistakable" (Freud, 1923/2011, p. 62).

Freud (1923/2011) then turns to the multiplicity of object identifications of the ego, trying to understand how the conflict between them may be experienced by it in a "normal" or pathological way. In this point, he will try to define a specific modality of identification which is particular to the formation of the superego. If on one hand the superego and on the other the ego are both constituted by identifications, how can both elements be distinguished? "This leads us back to the origin of the ego ideal; for behind it there lies hidden an individual's first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory" (Freud, 1923/2011, p. 38-39). At first sight, this does not seem to be the result or consequence of an object-cathexis; before that, it would be a direct and immediate identification, older than any libidinal

cathexis. And we add: below the Oedipus. It is without a doubt a really obscure excerpt, for it puts at stake precisely the supremacy of the Oedipal heritage of the superego.

Gerez-Ambertín (2003) considers that, in The Ego and the Id, we have the opportunity to distinguish this problematic of the identifications and of the superego. As Freud (1923/2011) himself explains, the ego is a "precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes, . . . contains the history of those object-choices" (p. 36). Hence, it would be the result of the regressive identification linked to the secondary and Oedipal identification. However, Gerez-Ambertín (2003) affirms that the superego is rooted into the primary identification or in intrusive incorporation, which are forms to refer to the identification "with the father of the personal pre-history". In the first case, we have an identification marked by a process of assimilation and substitution; in the second, we find the mark of the intrusive, unassimilable, traumatic and fixating: "The first is susceptible to mobilization, the second is more remiss and tends to *fixation*, even establishing at times an inexpugnable *bunker* as *types of character*" (Gerez-Ambertín, 2003, p. 110). Gomes (2000) highlights the issue as well, mentioning that when Freud talks about incorporation (*Einverleibung*), it is because he stresses that it is something completely unbearable.

For Cardoso (2002), Freud's supposition that the formation of the superego is the result of a precocious identification contradicts the idea that he is the heir to the Oedipus complex. She stresses that, in the face of the obscurity of the excerpt, we cannot not question theoretically the idea of identification "with the father of the personal pre-history", a modality of identification which is quite enigmatic in the Freudian text. In addition, from her part, she considers that the notion of identification is quite problematic for an analysis of the genesis of the superego. Then, she considers that Freud's appeal to this myth of pre-history is an important indication of the archaic character of the origin of the superego, in addition to being a sign of the limitations of the theorization about the concept of the superego.

In the face of the archaic character of the primordial identification for the genesis of the superego, the theoretical conundrum resulting from this idea will establish a strong link between this agency and the id, the drive, as observed by Nakasu (2012). For if the superego is an effect of this identification and, at the same time, the heir to the Oedipus complex – a secondary identification with the prohibitions that result from its dissolution – it is not possible to elaborate a "harmonious and univocal" formulation for the concept.

In this sense, the ineluctable aspect of the element that – according to the "model" of melancholia – confronts the ego with a cruel part of itself is imposed. Freud (1923/2011) himself will say that the conflicts between the different identifications in which the ego is distributed cannot be clearly defined as pathological. They would actually be structural. Gerez-Ambertín (2003) would then say that there will be no solution for the cruelty with which the superego destroys the ego and to whom, from this sadism, it provides a masochist enjoyment.

This impasse about the genesis of the superego and its status in the set of psychic agencies will remain in Freud's work throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the end of his work, he will limit himself to some sort of "conciliation" between these contrasting aspects of the superego. And, in the face of the limitation of his theoretical model, still in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923/2011) faced the need to situate the drive dimension that originated the superego in a "personal pre-history", as well as to conceive the "punitive" aspects depending upon the arrangements that identify the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Cardoso (2002) will then say that: "Freud's theory produces some sort of overlapping of the numerous extremities implied in the issue of the superego – self-attack, prohibition, ideal – without the elaboration of the problem of the points of passage from one to the other" (p. 32)

Conclusion: The "Myth" and the Sign of the Agency

Let us see then how in the work published ten years before, *Totem and Taboo*, we can surmise a way to understand these paradoxical aspects of the superego, based on the myth of the murder of the father. A consistent point of intersection between both references – the myth of the murder of the father and the superego – emerges in this moment of our analysis. It is a very valuable point for our aim of outlining an understanding of the paradoxical aspects of the superego. We refer to *guilt* as a fundamental conceptual connector for the "myth" and for the agency.

Guilt is the key figure in the universe of the superego, and it becomes an essential piece in the myth of the origins described by Freud (1913/2012). The guilt certainly foreshadows the consequences from the definition of that agency ten years later. The guilt felt by the sons after the death of the father is not purely a retroactive effect of the love felt for him, there is also the hatred for the power of the father and the fear of his vengeance, the worry that he might come back to retaliate the insult he suffered. The totem ritual that honors him proves that: it is not only to praise him, but to symbolically relive the triumph over him. And more: to devour the totem at the feast is to incorporate him through love, to accomplish the identification, but also to make the remains of the terrible animal disappear.

This intention of exhausting the father in the occasion of the ritual reveals his permanence as a *specter*, since the ritual tends to always repeat itself. A rest of the primal father remains and is impossible to analyze, it is an opposite of the dead father that cannot be warded off, in spite of the repeated efforts to pacify him. Gomes (2003) affirms that this which presents itself as the remnant of the father of the horde configures precisely "a flaw in the law" (p. 277), which will be resumed a few years later with the concept of death drive.

The permanent need to renew the pact with the totem occurs due to this terrible part of the father; a part which is not added to the dead father as a representative

of the law, but which proves the gaps contained in it, even though it is important to highlight that there is no possible ground for the superego except inside the totem system, i.e., based on the establishment of the symbolic order initiated from the renunciation to the satisfaction of the desires of incest and parricide. The previous condition for that "evil impulse" to fulfill its destiny of corroding the symbolic formations that are established by law is the establishment of the law.

Thus, there is no possible ground for the action of the superego, except inside the symbolic system, so ever since the establishment of the culture its own destructive formula is already inscribed in its core. In any case, the spectral part of the terrible father that commands through force and incites violence still remains. As Gerez-Ambertín (2003) observes:

If it is necessary to renew the pact in the celebration and in mourning, it is because not-all-of-the-terrible-father was transformed into a system; his opposite and the fear of his return are holes in the law. What enters through these holes is the identification with the father through incorporation and the intensification of the prohibition to kill, which may result in an imperative of opposite direction: *Kill!* Or *Fornicate incestuously!* Thus, there is still a bipolarity in which there is no negotiation of the negative and the evil of the father with the protector and the kind. The father that protects and preserves life also attacks and leads to death. Through a Möbian strip, the evil and sanguinary father slides together with the purified father, with pure goodness. (p. 53)

At the same time, there is still the powerful father who, even despotically, fascinates the sons to the point that they submit themselves through the glimmer of his exorbitant power and through the belief that his power would keep them safe from the adversities of civilization and its related helplessness. When dead, the father as a symbolic representative of the law provides the possibility of each one of them exercising their desire, even though it is in a way that is controlled and limited by the totem, but he would also expose their sons to the contingencies of being "on their own", having only the symbolic system as a mediator. I.e., they are subject to being constantly annihilated by one another due to the fact that the symbolic system is limited in its task of containing the order of the drive. On the other hand, when alive, the father dominates, vociferates, assaults, enjoys. However, in this power illusion of his, he keeps others safe from themselves, for he is the only one who detains the prerogative of force: a continuous damnation which marks help during suffering.

Indeed, the registers of the father that can be extracted from *Totem and Taboo* are: as an animal of the totem sacrifice; as an omnipotent god; and as a feared figure, whose possibility of return brings horror and incites enjoyment. It is from the latter that the demonic

power of the superego is surmised, its side of an “evil impulse”, the side capable of guiding toward the senseless order and that never fulfills its pacifying function. In the face of that, Cordeiro and Bastos (2011) highlight that the superego emerges as a psychic agency which is not identified with the regulating law; on the contrary, it conveys a senseless law since it incites enjoyment beyond measure.

With respect to the issue of the genesis of the superego proposed by Freud (1923/2011) once it is definitely established as a psychic agency, the mythical construction exposed in Totem and Taboo seems to be capable of attempting a “retroactive” answer. The superego consists in this reluctant resource of opposition to desire, to the point that in Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, Freud (1926/2014) puts under his aegis the most obscure of all resistances, for it seems to come from the conscience of guilt itself or from an obscure need for punishment.

Indeed, the paradoxical position of the sons with respect to the father emerges as a useful image of the position of the individual in the face of the superego, which has in the formula of its “double heritage” – the Oedipal heritage and the drive heritage – the metapsychological structure of that image. By enabling the emergence of the law, the death of the father also leads to the always insidious return of the specter of the terrible father who incites the exhaustion of desire, understood here as the lack of enjoyment that supports the validity of culture. The superego that emerges from the Oedipal conflict, in its turn, attacks the subject, blaming him for his desire. However, this dimension of the

attack could not be undertaken without the contest of the law which prevents access to enjoyment, of which the superego is a mediator – the superego that arises from the law insurrects against this dimension with the purpose of exhausting it, carrying out the always cruel order of the father of the horde. Agreeing with this, Gomes (2003) will say that the action of the superego, identified “as a mute voice which acts as by pure enunciation, [...] manifests itself as a pathology of the law, since it can stop regulating and turn against the subject, imposing to him insatiable demands” (p. 280)

In any case, this outline seems very promising for its task of gathering the rudiments that mark the superego, which at times are so incompatible. From the resource of the founding myth of Totem and Taboo, we obtain an image, more or less finished, of that which can be considered the “task” of the superego: promoting the law beyond what the subject can bear, giving in to the imperative of the terrible father.

Totem and Taboo (1913/2012) is unfolded from that moment on in Freud’s work, considering the myriad of issues it entails. While it condensates many of the themes analyzed up to that moment, as we saw above, its approach of the origins initiates and formalizes a new set of inquiries that, from then on, become fundamental for the development of psychoanalysis. It is precisely the theoretical consequences of this work that we believe to be useful as a “conceptual scheme” with a surprising heuristic power for all the Freudian approach, both in the register of the clinic as in civilization and its discontents.

O pai da horda e o superego: de um prenúncio da instância

Resumo: Este artigo desenvolve reflexões que visam evidenciar o lugar de destaque da obra *Totem e Tabu* no corpo teórico da psicanálise. Utiliza-se então a noção de superego, que reconhecemos enquanto exemplo profícuo deste “poder heurístico” de *Totem e Tabu* para suscitar desenvolvimentos sobre a cultura, clínica e teoria psicanalítica. O superego consiste numa noção importante da teoria psicanalítica mesmo antes de sua formulação enquanto instância psíquica; trata-se de um elemento conceitual em constante trabalho de elaboração. Por conseguinte, acentua o aspecto equívoco de tal conceito, pois consiste em uma noção atravessada por paradoxos. Por fim, utiliza a obra *O Eu e o Isso* enquanto outro polo desta empreitada, pois é nessa obra que o superego é enfim nomeado e designado como instância psíquica. Ressalta-se aqui o aspecto paradoxal do superego de poder ser referido ao lugar do pai no mito freudiano da horda primitiva.

Palavras-chave: pai, superego, metapsicologia, cultura.

Le père de la horde et le surmoi: d’un présage de l’instance

Résumé: Cet article déploie des réflexions qu’ont l’intention de mettre en évidence l’importance de l’œuvre *Totem et Tabou* pour la théorie psychanalytique. On utilise alors la notion de surmoi, que nous reconnaissons comme un exemple de ce “pouvoir heuristique” de *Totem et Tabou* pour déployer questions sur la culture, la clinique et la théorie psychanalytique. Le surmoi est composé d’une notion importante de la psychanalyse même avant de sa formulation comme une instance psychique; il s’agit d’un concept sur une constante élaboration. On souligne aussi l’aspect controversé de ce concept, parce qu’il consiste en une notion paradoxale. Finalement, on utilise l’œuvre *Le Moi et le Ça* comme l’autre extrémité de cette entreprise, parce que c’est dans cette œuvre que le surmoi est enfin nommé et désigné comme une instance psychique. On souligne alors l’aspect paradoxal du surmoi qui peut être référé au lieu du père dans le mythe freudien de la horde primitive.

Mots-clés: père, surmoi, métapsychologie, culture.

El padre de la horda y el superyó: de un presagio de la instancia

Resumen: Este artículo desarrolla reflexiones destinadas a destacar la importancia del trabajo *Tótem y Tabú* en el cuerpo teórico del psicoanálisis. Se utiliza la noción de superyó, que reconocemos como un ejemplo fecundo de este “poder heurístico” de *Tótem y Tabú* para elevar desarrollos de la cultura, clínica y teoría psicoanalítica. El superyó es un concepto importante de la teoría psicoanalítica, incluso antes de su formulación como instancia psíquica; es un elemento conceptual en el trabajo de desarrollo constante. Por lo tanto, se hace hincapié en el aspecto equivoco de este concepto, porque consiste en una noción atravesada por paradojas. Finalmente, se utiliza el trabajo *El Yo y el Ello* mientras el otro polo de este esfuerzo, ya que es en este trabajo que el superyó es nombrado y designado como instancia psíquica. Luego destaca el aspecto paradójico del superyó que se puede denominar en el lugar del padre en el mito freudiano de la horda primitiva.

Palabras clave: padre, superyó, metapsicología, cultura.

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